

SERMON

PREACH'D before the

UNIVERSITY

OF

O X F O R D,

At St. *MARY's*,

ON

ACT SUNDAY in the AFTERNOON,
JULY 8. 1733.



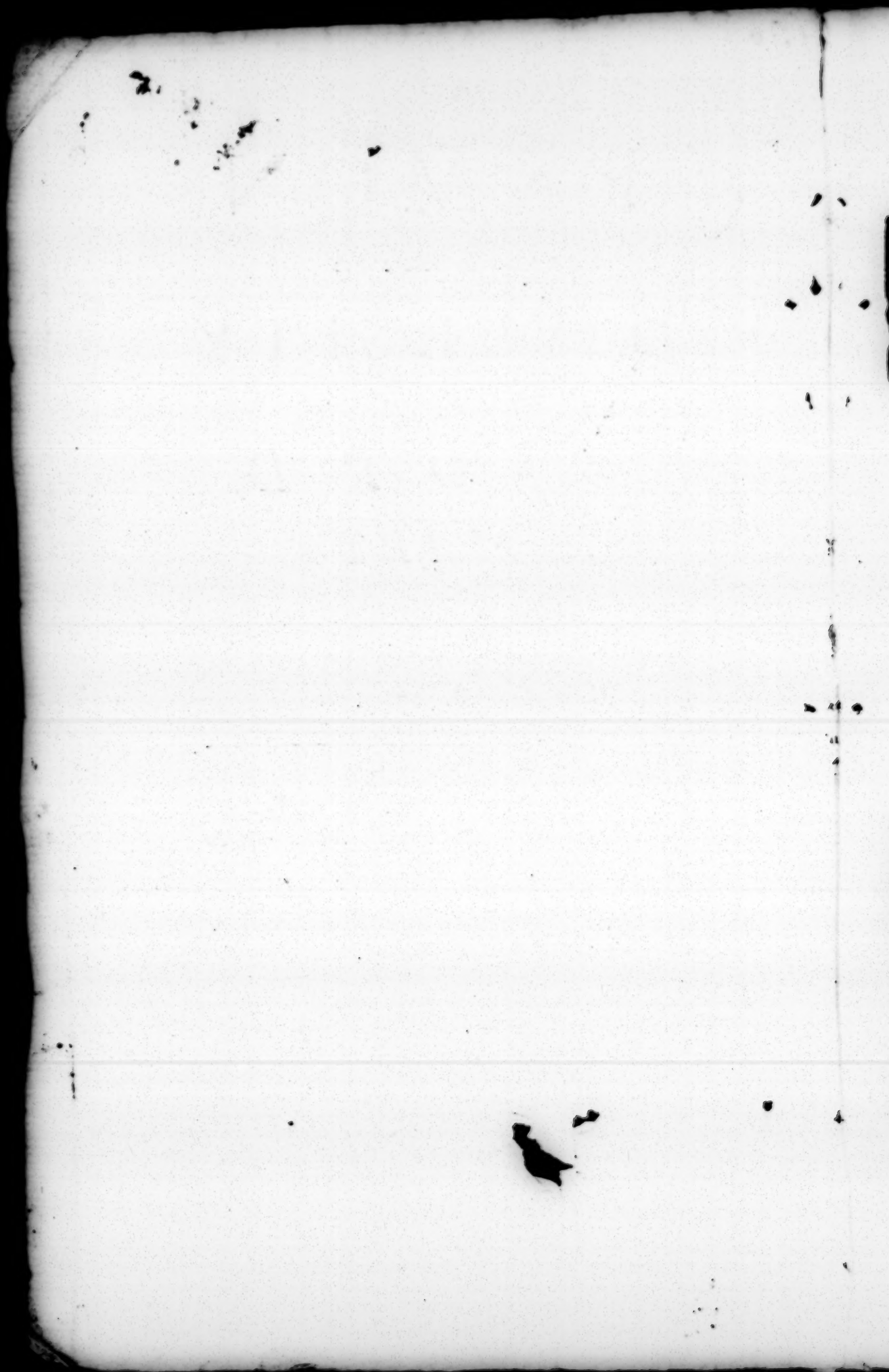
By *THOMAS SECKER*, L. L. D. Pre-
bendary of *Durham*, Rector of *St. James's*
Westminster, and Chaplain in Ordinary to
His MAJESTY.

Published at the Request of the Vice-Chancellor,
and Heads of Houses.

THE FIFTH EDITION.

L O N D O N:

Printed for S. WILMOT; and are to be sold by W. INNYS,
in *Ludgate Street*; S. MORT, in *Ave-Mary Lane*; and
T. LONGMAN, in *Pater-noster Row*. 1734.





DEUT. xxxii. 46, 47.

And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day; which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law.

For it is not a vain thing for you: because it is your life; and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.

T H E S E words contain the last exhortation, which *Moses*, the great founder of the *Jewish State*; gave his countrymen; on the very day wherein he had notice of his approaching death. He had freed them, with infinite danger to himself, from *Ægyptian Tyranny*, and the worse bondage of *Idolatry* and *Superstition*: He had received for them, from *God's* own mouth, such *Laws of life* as in their circumstances were most conducive to *Virtue* and *Happiness*: These he had delivered to his people, established on the surest foundation of regard; affectionate reverence to the Object of all duty;

4 *A Sermon preach'd before*

duty, and Author of all good : He had laboured, with infinite patience, through a long course of years, to cultivate in them this important principle of religious Obedience : And now, drawing near to the close of a life spent in their Service, he recommends it again ; first, with all the force of a most perswasive Eloquence ; and afterwards by every charm that Poetry itself could add ; setting happiness and misery before them, in an Ode of divine sublimity and spirit, which they are commanded by Heaven to learn themselves, and teach their Posterity. This therefore he communicates in a solemn manner to the whole Congregation, as the conclusion of all his cares for them ; and then takes his final leave in the Exhortation of the text, confirming once more at his death the importance of those Precepts he had been giving them thro' his whole life. *Set your hearts, &c.*

Their own observance of God's law was securing the felicity of one generation only : but educating their Children in Religion and Virtue, this was perpetuating blessings to each part of the Society and to the whole : lasting Prosperity and Peace, in the good land they were going to possess ; and in that *better Country*, of which it was an Emblem, *Length of days for evermore.*

The words afford then a just occasion for speaking,

I. Of the Advantages of right Education ; and,

II. The duty of endeavouring that these Advantages may be obtained

I. The Advantages, and indeed Necessity of right Education.

Other

the University of Oxford. 5

Other creatures arrive, without their own care, at the small perfection they are capable of, and there stop: But the whole of Man's existence, that appears, is a state of Discipline and Progression. Youth is his preparation for maturer years: This whole life, for another to come. Nature gives the Abilities to improve; but the actual Improvement, we are to have the pleasure and the merit of giving ourselves and one another. Some minds indeed, as some soils, may be fruitful without cultivation; others, barren with it; but the general necessity is the same in both cases; and in both, the richest and most capable of producing good fruit will be over-run, if neglected, with the rankest and worst weeds.

Now the only universal provision, that can be in this respect, Christianity hath blessed the world with, by introducing a stated method of Instruction, unknown before; which, joyned with the Parents private care, is, to the generality of mankind, sufficient for the purposes of intellectual and moral improvement. But to Persons of more extensive influence, a more particular and appropriated institution is necessary; for the world's sake, as well as their own. This, with regard to the Teachers of Religion, men almost without exception acknowledge: but too commonly forget in another case, of no less Importance; theirs I mean, whose Authority is to enforce the laws of conduct, and whose Example to lead the way in life. Here sometimes a wrong care, often an imperfect one, is taken by the fondest Parents. The outward Accomplishments and Decencies of behaviour they teach them with great exactness, and do well: but then, without the least farther provision, send them abroad into the School of the World, there to learn what they

can.

6 *A Sermon preach'd before*

can. The consequence is, what must naturally be expected: Trifles and Follies, ever readiest at hand, and best suited to the unjudging mind, get first into possession; and, in many, leave place for nothing else to enter. Such, unqualified for the valuable Employments of life, must lose their days in the low amusements of a false and effeminate Politeness; hoping for no higher a character, than a set of creatures, equally contemptible, can give one another by mutual Admiration; and happy after all, if they chance to preserve an innocent Worthlessness.

But suppose room left for some attention to knowledge; not even the forms of decent Carriage, though obvious things, are fully learnt without regular application: what sort of acquaintance then with Science must that be, which is pick'd up occasionally and by accident? A thorough one indeed we must judge it, were the first appearance to determine us; that air of Sufficiency, with which a person thus educated for the most part delivers his sentiments. But if we examine, as the World will, what is under this appearance to support it; then a mind is discover'd, thoughtlessly persuaded of its own Knowledge, where it is very ignorant; and Affecting knowledge, even though it is conscious of having none: first making hastily whatever determination is fashionable, about questions half understood, and not at all consider'd, be their Importance what it will; and then going on immediately to act upon this determination, without the least diffidence, or the least thought what the Laws of human actions are. unmov'd by Reason, and scorning it; but changing frequently on mere fancy, and fluctuating through life without rule or guide, from the forward extravagancies

vagancies of a profligate Youth, to the end of an early and despicable Old age.

The benefits of Conversation greatly depend on the previous attainments, both of those who are supposed to communicate knowledge and to receive it. If therefore Instruction be neglected, Conversation will grow trifling; if perverted, dangerous. Still Acquaintance with the world, however corrupted, may be an useful part of Education; but then it must be the last. It gives a beautiful Polish: but of this the best prepar'd mind will be the most susceptible. It teaches many things: but good or bad, according as the Learner is qualified to distinguish. He, whom improved good sense hath enabled to observe upon common practice, will extract Wisdom and Virtue from the vices and follies of mankind. But such as are ignorant, and capable only of imitating, will of course admire the worst of what they see; and be the more effectually ruined, the more they aim to be accomplished. It is therefore a merciless thing, to throw out poor creatures, without any foundation laid in them of what is right, to shift for themselves where so much wrong is to be learnt.

Regular cultivation of the understanding then is what good education begins with. The earliest branch of this, acquaintance with useful Languages, unlocks the treasures of ancient Learning, and makes the Improvements of every age and climate our own. Then the politer parts of literature most agreeably open the Faculties, and form the taste of young persons; adorn and endear the Conversation of our riper years; give a Grace to wisdom and virtue; relieve the Fatigue of our busy hours, and elegantly fill up the Leisure of our vacant ones.

At

8 *A Sermon preach'd before*

At the same time the art of just Reasoning opportunely comes in, to curb the licence of Imagination and direct its force ; to fix the foundations of Science ; ascertain the degrees of Probability, and unveil specious Error. With this guide we proceed securely. Knowledge of nature opens the Universe to our view ; enables us to judge worthily of the constitution of things ; secures us from the weakness of vulgar Superstitions, and contributes, in many ways, to the health and security, the convenience and pleasure of human life. If from hence we go on to survey mankind ; a contemplation of their different States in different Ages, and especially of their ancient Regulations and Laws, the publick Wisdom of brave and great nations, will furnish variety of useful reflections to the mind : often teaching us to improve our own condition, often to be happy in it.

It must be obvious, how rational an Entertainment these things are ; and how useful materials they furnish, to improve and perfect that Prudence and good Sense, which not only carries us through the Business of life, but gives relish and stability to the Pleasures of it. If then knowledge ought to be attain'd, the way to it ought to be made easy ; by removing Difficulties, cautioning against Mistakes, and leading forwards in a right Method. Above all, Application ought to be secured, by the authority of a prudent Instructor ; and Emulation excited, by a number of Fellow-learners.

But if Education stop here, it hath only given Abilities and Powers, the direction of which to right or wrong purposes is greatly uncertain still. He that knows not the proper use of his own Being ; *what is man and where he serveth be, what*

is his good and what is his evil ; may easily employ his other knowledge so, as to be much the worse for it. This inquiry then is the important one. Various methods of conducting life present themselves ; contradictory Inclinations demand to be gratified : the Conflict is painful ; the End of it may be more so : which way is right, and which shall we take ? Now there is a Science, that can direct us here : can shew us an inward Principle indued with native authority to govern all the rest ; obedience to which gives a steady aim and Self-approbation to our conduct, bestows on us the truest Pleasures of life, and delivers us from its worst Evils. Nor are Morals only the source of private Happiness, but the great foundation of mutual Security, the only one of Esteem and Friendship amongst men. A person of true Goodness, though otherwise of small accomplishments, will always make an amiable figure in society, and be a valuable part of it : whereas, without a virtuous heart, the superior Abilities of the great man will only render him a more extensive Mischief ; and the deceitful Agreeableness of the gay man qualify him to mislead, betray and ruin more intirely those he converses with. Thus where-ever Wick- edness increases, will Misery increase also ; till the end be universal Confusion. For though a Constitution sinking under vice may preserve for some time the florid look of Health ; yet inward strength and lasting vigour are what nothing but Virtue, publick and private, can give to any people. This is that true Wisdom, *in whose right hand is length of days ; and in her left, riches and honour.*

Now the foundations of Virtue are indeed laid by Nature, both in the reason and affections of
B
mankind :

10 *A Sermon preach'd before*

mankind: but Reason is so often inattentive, and Affections are so easily depraved, that without farther care, those moral principles, which make the best part of our inward frame, will in most men be greatly obscured, and in some, to all appearance, quite effaced. And, were even those of righter minds left each to form their private system; Tenderness for their own failings, or Prejudice for those of the world, would often lead them into imperfect notions and wrong practice. One indispensable branch then of liberal Education is an accurate institution in this important Science: to pull off the Disguises which vice affects to wear, and place the Consequences of it in a just light; to point out the less obvious advantages of Virtue, and shew its restraints to end in real Freedom; to represent the strict Connections of its several parts, and make strong the proof, that *knowledge of wickedness is not wisdom; neither at any time the counsel of sinners, prudence.*

And when should the Science of life be taught, but in the Beginning of life: whilst the natural regard to Right and Truth, the only inward restraint of incautious youth, remains uncorrupt; and the few Seeds of vice lie loosely scattered on the surface of the mind; much harder to be removed, when once they have taken root, and twisted themselves strongly about the heart. This therefore is the favourable opportunity, in which Authority and Reason must exert at once their joint force. For Discipline without instruction is mere Tyranny: and Instruction without Discipline, little better than useless talk. Things owned to be fit and good are neglected, because disagreeable; things evidently hurtful pursued, for present pleasure. Here Authority comes in

to

to the aid of Reason ; inforces virtuous Application ; restrains vicious Indulgences ; tempers the Warmth of youth ; prepares us for the future Subordinations of life ; conducts us safe through the unseen dangers of our most dangerous time ; and then by gentle degrees withdraws its influence, as the power of Self-government grows up. Where want of this care leaves young persons too soon in the worst of hands, their own ; it is dreadful to see, what irretrievable Miseries in the very beginning of their course they plunge into. And therefore, the more Liberty they are afterwards to enjoy ; the more prudent, tho' not stricter, Restraint they should be under at first ; and enter'd by slow steps into the world at large, with all possible Cautions given them of the hazards they are going upon, and (God knows) have little reason to be eager for.

But the most serious part of Education is wanting still : the part which leads us, by the esteem of moral Excellence, to honour and love that Being, in whom the perfection of it dwells ; and extends our inward sense of duty, suggested first by the low and short-liv'd Relations between us and our fellow-creatures, to the highest possible and eternal Object of it, the Creator and Ruler of this Universe. He by whose Pleasure we are, from whose Favour all we enjoy and hope for comes, according to whose Determination our whole existence shall be happy or miserable, is not surely one we are unconcerned with. And, however a base nature may value itself on the impotent Affectation of slighting God ; every worthy mind will delight to express that Veneration and pay that Obedience, which are due to him who is the Lord of all : due by every strongest claim, whether unassisted reason discover the

general Laws of his moral kingdom ; or infinite Wisdom, the best judge of our circumstances, condescend to adapt to them farther obligations. It is indeed the Sense of our living under His government and care, that makes our condition of Being desirable. Religion, filling the mind with that Object it naturally seeks, a sovereign Protector infinitely wise and good, effectually excludes all superstitious Terrors ; and, far from depressing the tenderest spirit, exalts us into every Thought and every Hope, that is great and noble. Turbulence of passions and Obstinacy of self-will, these are the things that tear and weaken the Soul : Reverence of God, by †awing them into composure, strengthens every inward Principle that ought to be strong ; and if it prunes the Luxuriances, promotes by so doing the Vigour of the mind. Religion comprehends at once every Motive, both of virtue and of private interest, that can either direct or support the heart in every part of conduct ; joins in perpetual union our Duty and our Happiness ; and makes the universal scheme of things consistent, beautiful and good.

Surely then, Principles of such a tendency ought to have an early and diligent cultivation in every breast ; but theirs especially, whose Rank or Profession will make it of the most publick consequence. They who object against this care, as instilling Prejudices, should consider, that Virtue, Honour, Decency, are prejudices just of the same sort ; and think what would follow, were men to enter upon life free from the bias of any one good quality. But in truth, God himself, not man, hath planted these just prepossessions in the heart : and all Education does, is to favour their growth. Religion, and the
evidences

evidences for it, may indeed be unfairly represented by its Teachers: And what part of knowledge may not? But are only the Teachers of Religion capable of misrepresenting it? Hath not every vicious man as strong a motive to incline him against it; as even those maintained by it have, to incline them in its Favour? Hath not Fondness of novelty, and Affectation of superior sense and learning, as great influence on some persons, as Credulity can have on others? Do we not every day see men determine positively against Religion, who are known never once to have thought of it in earnest; and attack it by all the unfair arts in the world, whilst they themselves are declaiming against such arts? Do we not see them even triumph in the thought of its being false, though the everlasting happiness of every good man depends upon its Truth? And are these the worthy Spirits, to whose tutoring young persons are to be delivered over in their native Ignorance, for fear of prejudices? Or is it not on all accounts wise and fit, that the mind, whilst untainted with evil communication or vice, should have the most important of all truths confirm'd to it by proper Arguments; and be formed to the right and happy temper, of chearful Obedience to the greatest and best of Beings, *the Father and God of our lives?*

Since therefore instruction of youth in Religion, Virtue and Knowledge, appears attended with so many advantages; it follows,

II. That all persons concern'd should endeavour, with united care, in their several stations, that these Advantages may be effectually obtain'd; especially in the Places dedicated to that purpose.

The

14 *A Sermon preach'd before*

The publick care, in this respect, we must ever gratefully own, continu'd thro' a long succession of our Princes; and flourishing still in its height, under the Administration of a King, zealous for the Happiness of his people, and resolute to maintain all the Rights of all his subjects. Next to whose assured and experienced Protection we cannot but thankfully acknowledge the gracious Munificence of his Royal Consort; therefore bountiful to Religion and Learning, because she most intimately knows their value, and most affectionately esteems them.

Secure then of the publick Favour, to whatever is connected with the publick good; we have only their Attention to solicit who are personally interested: Parents, or whoever supply their place; The Conductors of Education; and, The Young Persons to be educated.

To you, who are Parents, nature itself hath given a tender concern for your childrens welfare, as your own; and reminds you justly, that, as you have brought them into the Dangers of life, your business it is to provide that they get well thro' them. Now the only provision commonly attended to, of Wealth and Honours, can never make happiness; unless the mind, on which all depends, be taught to enjoy them properly. Fortune, without this, will but lead them to more abandon'd sallies of extravagance; and Rank expose them to more publick censure. Education then is the great care you are entrusted with; scarce more for their sakes, than your own. You may be negligent of your Son's instruction: but it is on you as well as himself, that his Ignorance and Contemptibleness will bring both reproach and inconvenience. You may be regardless of his morals; but you may be the
Person

Person who will at last the most severely feel his want of them. You may be indifferent about his Religion : but remember, Dutifulness to you is one great precept of Religion : and all the rest promote such habits, as you may bitterly repent, when it is too late, your omission to cultivate in him ; and live and die miserable on his account, whom timely care had made your Joy and Honour.

Parents therefore should always be friends to Education, and to Places of Education : should wish well to them ; and never, without great reason, think ill of them. The enemies of Religion and Virtue, an increasing number, will of course be enemies to those who teach them ; and the more so, the more carefully they teach them. The enemies to either part of our happy Constitution, will look with an evil eye on Establishments, designed for the support of both. More private motives will excite injurious treatment of them from some persons. And even those of better meaning may be engaged, by Misinformations and Prejudices, to pass harsh judgments and say unfriendly things. But reasonable men will always distinguish, by what Persons, on what Grounds, with what Temper and what Views, disadvantageous characters are given, or reports raised. They will also consider, that the unhappy Divisions of this nation cannot but have caused, on all sides, in length of time, some degree of wrong Opinion and wrong Conduct towards one another ; mutual Jealousies and Misunderstandings between those, whose interests, and whose intentions, were in general the same : differences, which it must be ruinous to heighten, dangerous to continue, useless to pass judgment in ; but most important to reconcile,

by

16 *A Sermon preach'd before*

by such Conduct on every hand, as may give no Suspicion of ill design, but all Proofs of good. Friendly methods will not fail to unite the hearts of men ; and make them susceptible of mutual advice and improvement, assistance and benefit. Whoever will view the Seats of Learning, with these considerations present to his mind, will judge favourably concerning them ; and not only admire the pious Bounty of our Ancestors, who dedicated these delightful retreats to Knowledge and Virtue, founded these beautiful Structures, enrich'd them with such amazing treasures of Literature, and provided so nobly for the accommodation of fit Persons to enjoy and communicate the instruction of them ; but be thankful for the many and great Blessings they have conveyed to every age, and will, we hope, derive to latest posterity.

Ideas of Perfection are visionary things : but look into fact, and where will those, who inveigh against the Education of our Universities, recommend a more improving one ? The indulgent Softness of the parents family is mighty apt, at best, to give young persons a most unhappy Effeminateness ; the Governour, if he hath Abilities, hath scarce ever Authority to enforce Diligence ; want of Rivals keeps the mind languid ; and upon the whole, seldom any thing considerable comes out. If now the contrary method be taken, of sending them, raw and uninstructed, to visit foreign countries ; what Improvement will minds unprepared for improvement make there ? As to Religion ; the Disuse of frequenting its Exercises, and the daily View of its Corruptions, will be in danger of effacing all regard to it. With respect to Morals ; in the midst of so great Temptation, so little Restraint, and so
general

general bad Example, it must be a high degree of virtue, that can keep itself in Countenance. Then for such opportunities of instruction, as different Laws, Manners and Customs, may be supposed to give; these require a mind trained up before-hand to Attention and Judgment. On all others they will be just as likely to make wrong impressions as right, if they make any. But indeed what impressions of all kinds are usually made, and how far the Improvements brought home answer the national expence for them, lies within the compass of daily observation.

If then, in the next place, we compare at least foreign Universities with our own: Is their Theology worthier of God, more conformable to Reason and primitive Christianity; is their Philosophy juster and more solid, less full of Imagination and Hypothesis; than that of our great countrymen, whose names I need not suggest? Will the ornamental Rewards of learning be more fitly bestowed, where no time previous to the Application for them is required? Will Industry be more universal, without any Inspection over it; Behaviour more regular, without any Rule set to it; than where young persons are formed into orderly Societies, distinguished by proper Habits, restrained to proper Hours, obliged to proper Studies, and watched over with continual Care? Miscarriages after all, will happen in such numbers of such an age. But the general good order that reigns here, to most Foreigners, not the worst Judges in this case, appears incredible when related, and very surprising when seen. It remains only to wish, what there never was more hope of; that, as our Universities

C

18 *A Sermon preach'd before*

versities have long excelled all others, they may continually improve upon themselves.

But after all, Parents must not expect their children's Improvement should be great, unless they contribute their own share to it. If Indolence and Luxury be taught them by bad Example, or Prejudice against every thing serious and praise-worthy by bad Conversation, before they come hither; if they come with little or no charge given about Regularity and Application, but Licence be claimed for them in proportion to their Quality; or if, after the meer Form of a short confinement here, they are let immediately loose, to wear off by Negligence and Profligateness the few slight good impressions that could be made; what room hath the Parent to hope for Improvement, or complain if none be found?

But let him be careful in his own duty first; then the persons, to whom he commits his child afterwards, will undertake with some Comfort an office, laborious and important at all times; but particularly so in an age of uncommon Corruption: when the Expectations of good men are more than ever fixed on their discharging this trust well; and their Failure will give bad ones the double joy, of seeing wickedness flourish, and accusing them for it. Complaints indeed of unjust accusations were never better grounded: but complaints alone will do little good; and even deserved returns of Bitterness may do much harm. The only remedy is, that by well doing we put to Silence the unreasonableness of ill persons, and secure the protection of those who mean well.

The Educator of youth therefore will first perfect himself in each needful qualification, and
then

then apply to forming others. In every Science he will joyn the discoveries of later times with such Instruction, as may render the learning of former ages intelligible; and prudently direct the more particular attention of each person to such things, as may chiefly relate to their future part in life.

The Foundations of Religion he will lay deep and strong: recommending the great articles of it, not to the Passions of those under his care, by Warmth and Vehemence; but to their reason and faith, by just explications and conclusive arguments: neither loading Revelation with unauthorized Doctrines and needless difficulties; nor yielding up the least real part of it, to defend the rest; nor altering the least, to give it a more plausible appearance. A disputing and cavilling temper he will endeavour to restrain; but will treat with all Tenderneſs the doubts of an ingenuous mind; and ever encourage that sacred regard to Truth, which makes men worthy of Esteem, even whilst they err, and is the great Security of their returning into the right way. He will take fit opportunity of shewing, how closely a due regard to the Teachers of Religion and Virtue is connected with the practice of both. But the Persons, whose Employment teaching them is to be, he will studiously warn, that the only way of securing this regard is, by useful and exemplary Lives; prudent and inoffensive Conduct; and so hearty a friendship to all just and reasonable Liberty, as may give them unsuspected authority to oppose the dissolute Licentiousness, that in vain assumes its name.

To Civil Government he will conscientiously teach that dutiful obedience and honour, which

20 *A Sermon preach'd before*

Christianity requires all subjects to pay ; and which the happiest subjects in the world ought to pay with the chearfullest Gratitude. He will discourage with all possible care, the rage of party Zeal ; which warm and unexperienced minds too often mistake for publick Spirit. Admitted in this fair disguise, it possesses the whole Man ; tinctures his way of Thinking on almost every subject ; leads him to hate and injure worthy persons, to admire and associate amongst very bad ones ; with whom this immoral temper stands in the stead of all Merit, whilst indeed it hinders the acquiring of any. As life goes on, these Evils increase : which all the world complains of, but unhappily indulges at the same time ; instead of each curbing, on his own side, the eagerness and keenness of so malevolent a Principle. Young persons should therefore be reminded, that the Seats of Learning are purposely separated from the busy scenes of life ; which the time for engaging in will come but too soon : mean while the generous ardor of youth should be exerted in making the Preparation of useful knowledge and virtuous habits ; but ever tempered with such Mildness and Diffidence concerning matters which they need not judge of yet, as they will every day see more necessary in order to judge and act right.

This is indeed one part of Morals : and on every other part the Director of Education will have an attentive eye. Even the fallies of a well-meant Zeal he will prudently moderate, when they give Religion a gloomy appearance, or add to it a needless burden. But much more strictly will he guard against the opposite extreme of Libertinism and Profaneness : labouring to keep up, not only an outward Form of regularity,

but a serious awe of God, and sense of duty in every mind ; watching over each Tendency to vice, and considering wilful neglect of Application as a dangerous kind of immorality. In order to this great end of preserving morals, he will preserve and countenance, as far as it remains possible, that Temperance of living, Simplicity of appearance, and Frugality of expence, which are usually brought hither, and so peculiarly suit this institution ; keep the mind in fit temper for the Exercise of its faculties, and defend it from the corruptions of Luxury and Vanity ; lay the foundations of Health and Prudence in men for the rest of their days, and prepare them to be virtuous and easy in whatever Stations may prove their share.

It remains only now, that the Person, of whom all this care is taken, should know and improve his own happiness. Too many there are, that set out upon the important Journey of life, without a skilful, or perhaps a friendly hand, to conduct them through the difficulties of the untried and dangerous way. These are greatly excusable in their Faults, and pitiable in their Miseries. But of you God and Man will expect attainments, that may bear proportion to the Advantages you are blest'd with. Nature engages your Parents ; duty, honour, and interest, your Instructors, to consult your welfare : which they desire as much as yourselves, and understand better. Restrain therefore and apply yourselves as they direct ; though you not only feel it painful, but see it not yet beneficial : and trust those, who have all imaginable claim to be trusted, that, by quick degrees, the Pain will wear off, and the Benefit be evident.

Their

22 *A Sermon preach'd before*

Their province, who are devoted to the Service of Religion, will be to appear, perhaps after a very short Preparation, in an age strongly prejudiced against them and their function: sure objects, without Merit, of contempt and hatred; but, with it, capable still of being esteemed and useful. This situation, you see, requires in the first place, that you carefully acquaint yourselves with the Grounds Religion stands upon, and the chief Doctrines it teaches. Fear not therefore making free Inquiry into every thing. Others inquire with bad intention: if you do it not with good, you will want true Learning, to oppose against the false and half-learning of unbelievers. Only begin not your inquiry, till you are qualified: and end it not, till you have considered matters fully. Young minds, and often the most generous of them, are apt to pursue truth with an Impatience, that occasions their missing it. Nothing ought ever to stand against full Evidence, well weighed: but many things may induce those, who have yet had little time for thought, to think again, and be diffident in the mean while. For not only the world too commonly imputes to a man, all his life, the indigested notions of his early years; but persons lift themselves by positive Talk, and then cannot retreat. With this caution, and with due method, Diligence will go far in acquiring knowledge. But Knowledge is only one part of what must be attended to. The unguarded conduct, even of persons younger days, will be treasured up in many a malicious memory to their future Disadvantage: and, though an Affectation of untimely gravity fits ill, yet Innocence and Piety are the duties of every age. They especially, whose Profession will make a stricter abstinence

abstinence from doubtful and imprudent pleasures expected of them hereafter, will find it much the safest and easiest to begin now ; and, by an uniform life, grow regularly up into that Esteem, which their future character will require to support it.

And though neither the same Diligence of application, nor such Accuracy of conduct, may appear necessary in those of higher rank ; yet an improved understanding must be an Advantage, and the Want of it a blemish, proportionably conspicuous, as the station either appears in is publick : and the Choice, how life shall be spent, is always important in the same degree, as the Persons are who make it. Such therefore, of all others, should not take it hastily for granted, that an immoral course is right. To begin with Virtue at least, till fair inquiry rejects it, is evidently the safe part. No one ever bitterly condemned himself that he had spent his younger years soberly : many have, that they did not. Then, some Degrees of vice are owned to produce misery : and every Vice leads on to worse degrees of itself, and variety of others. Or, though a vicious Person could depend on suffering no present harm ; yet he cannot fail of doing a great deal : and a man would not chuse, that the chief Traces he leaves behind him, to mark out his passage through life, should be so many Injuries done his fellow-creatures. At least no one would venture upon this, till he were sure there is no superior Inspector of his conduct. Now there cannot be Certainty against Religion : and there are such Evidences for it, as must require more than a few slight cavils, or bold jests to overturn them. A careful Examination then it justly demands. And if upon
such

24 *A Sermon preach'd, &c.*

such examination it prove true, as undoubtedly it will ; remember it is a most serious Truth, in which the foremost of mankind is equally concerned with the meanest. Therefore in a case of such Moment, let no false shame, nor favourite passion prevail over you ; but *give your hearts early to the Lord that made you.* Lay the Foundation of your lives right here ; and build on it whatever is just and good, worthy and noble, till the structure be compleat in moral beauty. The world, which you are entring into, lies in wait with variety of Temptations. Unfavourable Sentiments of Religion will soon be suggested to you ; and all the snares of Luxury, false Honour and Interest, spread in your way ; which with most of your Rank are too successful, and to many fatal. Happy the few, that in any part of life become sensible of their Errors ; and, with painful resolution, tread back the wrong steps they have taken ! But happiest of men is he, who, by an even course of right Conduct, from the first, hath at once avoided the miseries of Sin, the sorrows of Repentance, and the difficulties of Virtue ; who not only can think of his present state with Composure, but reflect on his past Behaviour with conscious Approbation, and look forwards with unmixed joy to that important future hour, when he shall appear before God, and humbly offer to him, a whole Life spent in his Service !

F I N I S.

